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ABSTRACT

The Substitute Vocational Assistant Program (S.V.A.P.) was designed to provide highly motivated high school graduates with the opportunity to obtain New York State Education Department certification and employment as a vocational/trade education teacher. The program is a comprehensive experience, 5 and one half years in length, that includes a salaried teaching internship, occupational field work, and postsecondary academic study. During each year of program enrollment, participants must complete 5 months of supervised teaching in a vocational high school, 7 months of work in their trade, and postsecondary academic study in occupational education at the City College of New York. A survey of 12 individuals enrolled in the program and 2 program graduates examined participant characteristics, recruitment methods, reasons for program enrollment, experience with the S.V.A.P., ratings of the program, and participants' recommendations. The evaluation report concludes that the program has had satisfactory results in recruiting new vocational teachers. Respondents evaluated the program positively in quality of instruction, handouts and other teaching materials, equipment provided, support from the S.V.A.P., classroom service, work site assignment, and college course work. (JDD)

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**The 1992-1993 Evaluation of the
Substitute Vocational Assistant Program
April 1994**



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INTRODUCTION

Program Description

The Substitute Vocational Assistant Program (S.V.A.P.) was designed to provide highly motivated high school students with the opportunity to obtain New York State Education Department certification and employment as a vocational/trade education teacher. The program is a comprehensive five-and-one-half year experience that includes a salaried teaching internship, occupational field work, and post-secondary academic study.

Program candidates must be 18 years or older and a graduate of one of New York's public school vocational high schools. They must also be recommended by a nominating committee from their high school. During each year of program enrollment, participants must complete five months of supervised teaching in a vocational high school, seven months of work in their trade, and post-secondary academic study in occupational education at the City College of New York (C.C.N.Y.)*

In addition to the internship salary (90 percent of the contractual rate for a starting teacher), the S.V.A.P. fully reimburses participants' tuition and fees. All participants are expected to complete 31 credits of course work during the five years. In exchange for their salaried internship and scholarship, S.V.A.P. participants must sign a letter of commitment to work for five years as a trade/technical teacher in New York City's public schools.

* Acceptance into the S.V.A.P. is contingent upon admission to the City College of New York (C.C.N.Y.)

METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the functioning of the program and its impact on the students, the Board of Education of the City of New York's (B.O.E.) Office of Educational Research (O.E.R.) and the Office of Recruitment, Placement, Assessment, and Licensing (O.R.P.A.L) jointly developed a questionnaire to be sent to 1991-1992 program participants and graduates. Questions focused on the characteristics of program participants, and their opinions regarding their experience with the S.V.A.P. The questionnaire was mailed to 46 participants: 20 who had already graduated and 26 who were still enrolled in the program.

FINDINGS

Overview

Of the 46 questionnaires sent, 14 (30 percent) were returned completed. Twelve of the respondents were still enrolled in the program, and two were program graduates.

All of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years old. Ten (71 percent) of them were male and four (29 percent) were female. The ethnic background of the respondents was more evenly distributed: four of the 14 respondents were white (29 percent), five were Latino (36 percent), four were African-American (29 percent), and one was an Asian/Pacific Islander (7 percent). The trades and status of the respondents were as follows:

Gas & Electric Arc Welding	1 respondent	Active
Electronics	1 respondent	Active
Electrical Installation	5 respondent	Active
Jewelry Making	1 respondent	Active
Aviation Technician	1 respondent	Active
Graphic Communication	1 respondent	Active

Aviation/Avionics	1 respondent	Active
Aviation Maintenance	1 respondent	Active
Culinary Arts	1 respondent	Graduated
ColdType	1 respondent	Graduated

How Recruited

Thirteen of the 14 respondents found out about the S.V.A.P. through a teacher or B.O.E. employee. Only one respondent found out about the program through a circular or brochure issued by the B.O.E. Eight (57 percent) of the respondents were recruited by their former high school, and two (14 percent) were recruited by the S.V.A.P. coordinator. The remaining respondents' recruitment was a collaborative effort between their former high schools and the S.V.A.P. coordinator. Almost all of the respondents (93 percent) considered the personnel who recruited them helpful during their enrollment process. One respondent (7 per cent) considered them unhelpful because he blamed a teacher for the loss of his scholarship.

Reasons for Program Enrollment

Respondents stated their reasons for joining the program as follows:

- Five respondents (36 percent) were motivated by the desire to become a teacher.
- Five respondents (36 percent) were motivated by their desire to share their experience with others.
- One respondent (7 percent) wanted to set an example for young people.
- One respondent (7 percent) joined because of the opportunity to continue his studies.
- One respondent (7 percent) was motivated because of the good job opportunity.

The S.V.A.P. had a major influence in the decision of nine respondents (64 percent) to continue with their education. Another four respondents (28 percent) reported that the program had not influenced their decision to continue studying.

Experience with the S.V.A.P

The work that the S.V.A.P. students performed in their service/teaching internships was very broad and included tasks usually performed by regular teachers--ie, teaching lessons, grading homework, assigning projects to students, preparing lesson plans, and working as mentors with the students.

Three respondents (two Latinos, one male and one female, and one African-American male) completed the service/teaching internship in one school. Two of them worked in the borough of Manhattan and one worked in Queens. Of the 10 remaining respondents (78 percent) who had not yet finished their teaching internship, five (45 percent) had worked in one school and the other five (45 percent) had worked in two schools.

The occupational field assignments were as varied as the crafts that the students were studying: food preparation, high and low voltage wiring, electrical installation, aircraft inspection and repair, typesetting, work on jewelry, etc. Four (28 percent) of the respondents had finished their occupational field work. One of these graduate had worked at only one work site, while another had worked at nine. The other two respondents had worked in three sites. Among the ten respondents enrolled in the program that had not yet finished their occupational field

assignment, three (30 percent) have thus far worked at one site, four (40 percent) have worked at two work sites, and three (30 percent) have worked at three sites.

Eleven (79 percent) of the respondents had not finished the course work requirements. This is consistent with the fact that most of the respondents are still active in the program, and have not yet graduated.

Graduates' Profile

One of the two graduates from the program had received his permanent New York State trade/technical teacher certification. The other has not yet received it. The reason given by the respondent is that the administration in the last school where he worked felt that "he wasn't strong enough with the students."

Both graduates are currently working as trade/technical teachers. Neither of them experienced any problems in finding a job. One expects to be rehired next year, while the other does not expect to be rehired because the school was not satisfied with his performance. Both graduates have experienced problems working as teachers, with one of them stating that he was troubled by the students' attitudes and disciplinary problems, and the other complaining about the limited amount of supplies provided.

Of the students that have not yet finished the program, the expected year of graduation is:

- 1992 (one respondent)
- 1993 (one respondent)

- 1994 (two respondents)
- 1995 (four respondents)
- 1996 (two respondents)
- 1997 (one respondent)

Participants' Program Ratings

The questionnaire asked respondents to rate five variables in terms of their usefulness in preparing them to become a trade/technical teacher, using a scale from one to five, with five representing "very useful" and one representing "not at all useful." The variables rated included: quality of instruction, handouts and other teaching material, equipment provided in the occupational field work, support from the S.V.A.P., overall administration of the S.V.A.P., the teaching internship service, occupational field work assignment, and college course work.

Quality of instruction. Seventy-one percent of the respondents (ten respondents) found the quality of instruction very useful, 14 percent (two respondents) found it average, and another 14 percent (two respondents) found it not at all useful. The reasons given by those who considered the instruction "not at all useful" were that only one of the instructors cared, and that the material was not updated and not in accordance with real-life situations.

Handouts and other teaching material. Seventy-eight percent (11 respondents) found the teaching material very useful, 14 percent (two respondents) found it to be standard, and seven percent (one respondent) found it not at all useful. The reason

given by this latter respondent was that the handouts were not informative of the real-life teacher/student/parent problems and situations.

Equipment provided in the work experience. Seventy-one percent of the respondents (ten respondents) found the equipment very useful, 14 percent (two respondents) found it standard, and another 14 percent (two respondents) thought that the equipment was not useful because they considered it outdated. One of them asserted that the city is not funding the schools with enough money to update supplies.

Support from the S.V.A.P. In evaluating the support from the S.V.A.P. staff, 50 percent (seven participants) found that the staff were "very useful", 28 percent (four participants) considered their support as standard, and 21 percent (three respondents) found them to be "not at all useful".

Each of the three participants who found staff support to be not useful stated different reasons. One respondent felt that the meetings with the S.V.A.P. staff consisted only of talk about money and union matters. Another respondent wrote: "I feel as though the superiors don't know I exist because my trade is the only one in the program. We never have professional topics concerning creative trades." The third responded said that there is no support from the S.V.A.P. when a student makes mistakes as an inexperienced teacher, claiming that "instead of receiving a constructive criticism, the result is termination."

Overall administration of the S.V.A.P. The respondents' opinions regarding the overall administration were also quite positive: 64 percent (ten respondents) considered their work "very useful", 21 percent (three respondents) thought it was normal, and only 14 percent (two respondents) considered it "not at all useful." One respondent wrote: "Did nothing for a whole year!!" The other respondent gave the administration a low rating, but pointed out that she had noticed an improvement with the new administration.

The classroom service. About two-thirds (nine) of the respondents also found the classroom service very useful. Thirty-five percent (five respondents) found it to be standard, and only seven percent (one respondent) found it not at all useful. The one respondent that found it not useful gave a wide variety of reasons: "Too many teachers are not role models, no updated lessons in lesson plan book, they expect perfection from a teacher in training, too many teachers with seniority that are burned out."

Work site assignment. Eighty-six percent (12 respondents) found the work site assignment very useful, and 14 percent (two respondents) found it to be average. None of the respondents found it not at all useful.

The college course work. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents (11 respondents) thought the college course work was very useful, seven percent (one respondent) considered it average, and 14 percent (two respondents) found it "not at all

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OER Report

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useful". The two dissatisfied respondents said their course work was uninformative. They wanted to know where to get information about finances for updating classroom equipment and how to be a good teacher in respect to supervision, the students, and the parents. They complained that there is only one college to choose from, and that staff and professors were not helpful.

Participants' Recommendations

Forty percent of the respondents (five) had suggestions for improvement. Among the suggestions for improvement of the teaching internship component were responsibility and more tasks in the school regular, teaching schedule, and more input in the grading process. On the other hand, the respondents demanded mentors* who are more concerned with the student's training, and also suggested that mentors be chosen not on the basis of seniority but on the basis of an evaluation done by the S.V.A.P. One student suggested that the participants should do the work assignment the first year, and then start teaching in their second year, so that they would feel more confident in the classroom.

Regarding the occupational field work, one respondent asked for a wider understanding on the part of the sponsors that "the S.V.A.P. students have other (more important) responsibilities to themselves as well as to the program." Another respondent demanded an increase in the students' responsibilities as they

* Mentors are the teachers that help the S.V.A.P. participants through their teaching internship.

improve their skills. Another respondent suggested that the work sites should be visited and evaluated by the program head. A concern raised by three out of the six students that made suggestions was that the students should receive the same treatment at their work sites as the regular employees-- "... field sites that are chosen should agree to treat us equally," "... make it known to the employer that the S.V.A.P. students will not be taken advantage of." Finally, one student suggested that the students should have three consecutive years in one company so that they can learn everything ("from A to Z") without interruptions. Now, he says, "There are too many interruptions, and every time you start in a new company, you have to repeat the basics." In the same vein, another student suggested that as their skills improve, they should be given more complicated tasks.

In order to improve the coursework component the students suggested an increase in the variety of colleges and less repetition of the coursework. They also asked for more real-life information that would help them to deal with pressures from supervisors, with the problem of controlling a class with 30 students, and students with language or learning disabilities.

In order to improve the S.V.A.P. as a whole, the respondents demanded more S.V.A.P. involvement in all activities. They also suggested increased communication between the program staff and the participants, a review of the mentor selection process, and input from the participants about their placement.

CONCLUSIONS

The S.V.A.P. goal of recruiting new vocational teachers for the New York City public schools seems to have had satisfactory results. The program was a major factor in motivating nine of the respondents to continue their studies, and nine other respondents are interested in obtaining a teaching position once they finish the program.

The implementation of the program regarding the school site component was quite homogeneous: all the students have worked either in one or two schools. However, there was greater variability of the implementation of the work site assignment, with some students working in one site and others working in up to nine different sites.

The respondents evaluated the program quite positively in all aspects that O.E.R. questioned: quality of instruction, handouts and other teaching material, equipment provided in the work experience, support from the S.V.A.P., overall administration of the S.V.A.P., classroom service, work site assignment, and college course work. Forty percent (five) of the respondents had suggestions for improvement, which seems to indicate a commitment to the program and their desire for its improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings O.E.R. recommends that program administrators:

- continue the program;
- choose mentors on the basis of an S.V.A.P. evaluation;
- start the teaching internship only after students have been working for one year at an occupational field work;
- visit and evaluate the work sites in order to determine their appropriateness for participant training;
- have students remain in one work site for at least one semester in order to learn all the aspects of the work;
- have college course work include seminars led by current teachers focusing on classroom management and other real-life teaching experiences; and
- allow participants more input about their placement.